EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION OF THE EU’S EXTERNAL ACTION SUPPORT IN THE AREA OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S AND GIRLS’ EMPOWERMENT

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION
Provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of the contribution of European Union (EU) external action support in the area of Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment (GEWE).

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE: All third countries.

TEMPORAL SCOPE: This study covers the period 2010-2018 for the Enlargement region and 2014-2018 for the other regions.

CONTEXT
As a core value enshrined in the EU’s treaties and legislation, including those of EU Member States (MS), GEWE is central to EU relations with third countries.

The EU’s reference framework for external action in the area of GEWE has also built on global frameworks such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

In 2008, the EU launched the first EU Gender Action Plan (GAP I). GAP I was adopted with a view to support gender equality both outside the EU and inside the Commission services involved in development cooperation. In 2015, the EU adopted a successor action plan, GAP II. GAP II strengthened the emphasis on an EU institutional culture shift related to GEWE, embraced more explicitly all areas of EU external action and outlined the EU’s strategic objectives around three thematic pillars: i) women’s and girls’ physical and psychological integrity; ii) empowerment of women and girls and promoting their socio-economic rights; and iii) strengthening voice and participation of women and girls.
Key findings

- The overall policy framework for EU external action in the area of GEWE significantly improved during the period under review. However, at the country level, a clear strategic vision on GEWE was often lacking among European actors (EU and EU Member States – EU MS).

- Previous evaluations of EU external action on gender (2003, 2015) called for fundamental changes in EU institutional culture. This has not yet occurred. Important capacity building needs persist and improvements in leadership and internal accountability have been slow and uneven across European actors.

- Even after several decades of efforts to strengthen gender mainstreaming in EU external action, successes remained limited during the period under review. This reflects the slow changes in institutional culture highlighted above.

- Although the full potential of joint EU programming and implementation is still to be harnessed, EU external action has added value to what EU MS could have achieved on their own related to GEWE. This applies especially to joint work in international fora: less so, and with high variability, to cooperation at the country level.

- While European actors have forged partnerships and joint initiatives with relevant international organisations such as UN agencies, coordination with these organisations at country level, especially to strengthen policy dialogue and the role played by national women’s machineries in national policy processes, has remained insufficient.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation followed a theory-based approach that relied on mixed methods to assess EU support in the area of GEWE. The design chosen revolved around multiple case studies, with data collection activities being carried out during an extensive desk phase and a (partially remote due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic) field phase. To guide data collection and analysis, the team prepared a detailed evaluation matrix, structured around nine evaluation questions (EQs):

- Six EQs focused on the EU strategic framework, EU approaches to implementation and the EU’s institutional culture shift on GEWE.
- Three EQs focused on the GAP II key thematic areas: i) physical and psychological integrity of women, ii) economic and social women’s empowerment and iii) women’s voice and participation.

The combination of tools and methods used for data collection and analysis varied according to the different EQs, but multiple sources were systematically used to triangulate the information collected. These activities included an extensive documentary review, a financial analysis on EU external action, phone and face-to-face interviews and three online surveys.

The main challenges encountered were coping with gathering data on outcomes and impacts, the inconsistency of some datasets at EU level, obtaining documentation on non-spending activities (e.g., policy dialogue), and coping with the field phase in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have often been a cornerstone for implementation of EU support; but, the quality of partnerships has been uneven, and the challenge of adequately responding to needs of grass-roots organisations remains unresolved.

- There have been advantages in the various financing instruments and modalities available to the EU to support GEWE. However, weaknesses in gender mainstreaming have led to an inadequate use of the mix of modalities and instruments available to support GEWE in an integrated and strategic way.

- There were positive achievements in all thematic areas where the EU has provided substantial support. In particular, EU made notable contributions to the strengthening of normative frameworks, including through actions promoting the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and the specific interventions focussing on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The EU has also enhanced CSO actions in the area of VAWG in many countries.

- A lack of strategic and integrated approach as well as difficulties in scaling up efforts based on successful experiences hampered the effectiveness of EU support to GEWE, particularly in the work done with CSOs.
Conclusions

POLICY LEVEL

1 Policy ambition
The high policy ambition of the EU in the area of GEWE has translated into increased attention to GEWE in most dimensions of EU external action, but no quantum leap has been observed during the period under review.

2 Overarching strategic framework
From 2015 on, GAP II has served as a useful tool for providing overarching strategic directions and for demonstrating the EU’s commitment to GEWE; however, tailoring this ‘overall architecture’ to specific contexts and translating it into a coherent strategic framework at country level have turned out to be challenging.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

3 Leadership and accountability
Despite unambiguous political messages at the highest level of the EU, the EU GEWE agenda has been pushed more by a few highly committed staff than by strong senior management engagement.

4 Expertise
While genuine efforts have been made to strengthen gender expertise within the EU, overall gender capacity has remained too weak to ensure an effective implementation of the EU’s policy commitments in the area of GEWE.

5 Intra-EU coordination
Despite some challenges, there has been good communication within EU services and among European actors; overall, there has been strong EU added value in EU external action in the area of GEWE.

PROGRAMMING AND IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

6 Strategic vision at country level
At the country level, EU external action in the area of GEWE often did not reflect a strong strategic vision based on clear priorities and a sound analysis of, e.g., the most pressing needs, the most effective entry points, and the most appropriate sequencing.

7 Gender mainstreaming
Gender mainstreaming has remained weak with three general aspects largely explaining the limited improvement in this area: i) the lack of EU strategic vision on GEWE at country level; ii) the lack of understanding of the concept of ‘gender mainstreaming’; in particular its strategic nature; and iii) the mismatch between the EU policy ambitions in GEWE and the resources mobilised to achieve them. However, significant gender-targeted funding in bilateral cooperation has had strong positive effects on gender mainstreaming.

8 Partnerships: national government & international organisations
The EU has substantially strengthened its partnerships with international organisations (esp. UN agencies and the Council of Europe).

and this has enhanced EU external action in the area of GEWE at various levels; however, coordination with these organisations at country level, especially to strengthen the role played by national women machineries in national policy processes, has remained insufficient

9 Partnerships with CSOs
While the EU’s substantial support to CSOs active in GEWE has led to many positive experiences, the EU has yet to find an approach to ensure a more strategic and more comprehensive partnership on GEWE with these actors at country level, including a stronger involvement of grass-root organisations in EU external action.

10 Monitoring & Evaluation
There has been a lack of monitoring and evaluation at both local and national levels, which has significantly hampered accountability and learning.

11 Results
Despite the broad relevance of EU external action in the area of GEWE, visible results at the macro-level have been limited; achieving them has been hampered by weaknesses in the design of EU support to GEWE, but also by adverse contextual factors as well as challenges that are beyond the capacity of one single actor like the EU to address.

EUR 1.106 billion were contracted for gender-targeted interventions, during the period 2014-2018

Most of the committed amounts went to Africa
Sub-Saharan Africa received 52% of the total gender targeted support, and the Enlargement region 3% of the total

66% of the targeted interventions treated Physical and Psychological Integrity (including VAWG)

EUR 507 million Support channelled via UN agencies, mainly UN Women, UNDP and UNICEF

EUR 432 million Support channelled via CSOs, represented by 15% Women’s organisations

Targeted GEWE support reached a peak in 2018
with EUR 424 million of contracted amount in this area that year

Based on the findings presented in the answers to the evaluation questions, the team identified 11 conclusions grouped in three clusters.
Recommendations

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<th>POLICY LEVEL</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>Continue with the Gender Action Plan, while improving it</th>
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<td>R2</td>
<td>Ensure stronger leadership on GEWE</td>
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<td>INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL</td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>Place gender nearer to the top within the EU institutional environment</td>
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<td>R4</td>
<td>Improve EU gender expertise, especially at the country level</td>
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<td>PROGRAMMING AND IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL</td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Develop a shared strategic vision at country level</td>
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<td>R6</td>
<td>Step up efforts for continuous gender analysis and application</td>
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<td>R7</td>
<td>Introduce stringent rules for gender mainstreaming</td>
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<td>R8</td>
<td>Consolidate partnerships with international organisations, especially at country level</td>
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<td>R9</td>
<td>Enhance the involvement of CSOs in EU support to GEWE</td>
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The EU and EU MS should develop a successor strategy to GAP II capitalising on the experience gained under GAP II (and before), while clarifying some concepts and better presenting the interlinkages between the dimensions underpinning the framework.

The EU should step up efforts to ensure strong leadership on GEWE at EU’s top management at Headquarters (HQ) and country level.

The EU should ensure that, at HQ and country level, decision-making processes (incl. on programming) systematically involve staff or structures with a clear mandate related to GEWE.

The EU should improve gender expertise at all levels, but special efforts should be made at the country level, including allocation of resources for systematic mobilisation of project-based gender experts.

The EU should develop a strategic vision of what to do, and how, with regard to GEWE at country level which supports policy dialogue and is shared by all main European actors.

The EU should sustain recent efforts made in developing gender analysis, while stepping up efforts to ensure their ownership by EU staff and national stakeholders and strengthen national statistical capacity in partner countries.

The EU should implement more stringent measures to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in new interventions and monitor gender mainstreaming in implementation.

The EU should consolidate partnerships with international organisations at country level, including through increased staff awareness of existing joint initiatives and better linkages of EU support with international processes led by UN agencies.

The EU should enhance the involvement of CSOs, including women’s organisations, in EU support to GEWE, including through better integrating them in initiatives on GEWE at country level and more adapted support to grass-root organisations.